# Anniversary Address

February 25, 1920

by

## Dr. George L. Petrie

Pastor of the [illegible]terian Church

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Occasion of His 80th Birthday

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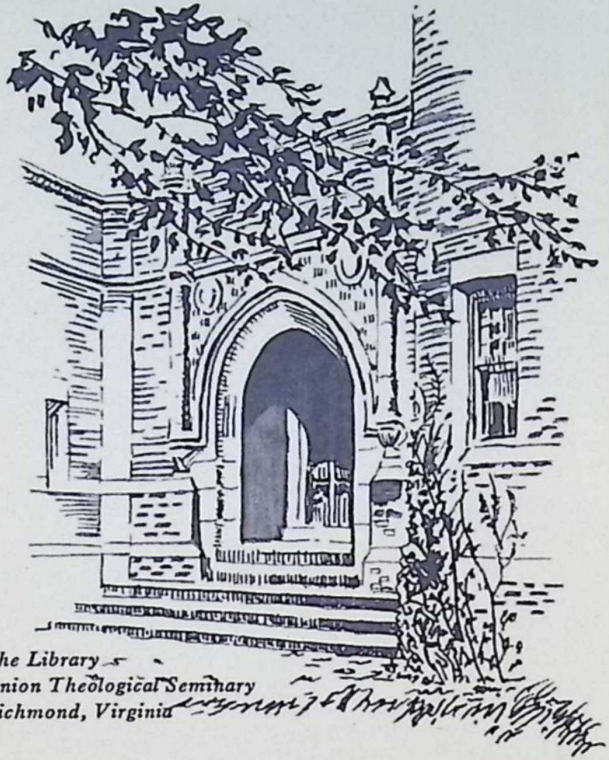

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# REMINISCENCES OF EIGHTY YEARS

Dr. Petrie announced last Sunday that Wednesday of this week would be an important anniversary of his life. He desired to improve the occasion for himself and for the church by delivering a special message Wednesday evening at the 8 o'clock service. The message will contain reminiscences, reflections and visions of eighty years. He invited all the people old and young, of the Presbyterian church and other friends to come and hear the special message. The program will include a social feature of friendly greeting and personal touch. All who come will receive a welcome at 8 P. M., February 25.

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# HONOR DR. PETRIE'S 80TH BIRTHDAY

One of the most unique, attractive and memorable celebrations in the whole long history of this community took place last evening at the First Presbyterian church on Market Street, when the congregation of that denomination and hundreds of the friends of the aged and reverend pastor, Rev. Geo. L. Petrie, D. D., assembled to do honor to him on the 80th anniversary of his birth. Though the exercises were simple and informal to a degree, and there was no display of fulsome praise or idle adulation, the large gathering was moved and touched in a way that could not have been surpassed by the highest bursts of oratory—the alert, upstanding, debonair and consecrated man of God, now mustered among the octogenarians, was the inspiration of the evening and was a program in himself.

The brief exercises consisted of the singing of several appropriate hymns by the choir and congregation, the reading of the 34th psalm of David by Dr. Petrie, an earnest prayer of thanksgiving and praise by Dr. Lipscomb, Presiding Elder of the Methodist church, and a reminiscent and spiritual address by the aged and cultured divine, reviewing in his own inimitable way the 8 decades of his years.

**Simple but Inspiring Exercises.**

The scene was inspiring and gripping and rarely has an audience been so lifted up, moved and carried away as was done by the simple, chaste and eloquent recital of the leading episodes and experiences in an unusually useful and fruitful life which has already passed the traditional "three score years and ten" fixed by the great singer of Israel of old.

The people heard him gladly, as they have these 42 years now in this community, and each and all felt the force of the inspired and masterful personality of the beloved pastor as he unrolled the remarkable facts of over 60 years as a minister of the Gospel. As he stood at his familiar pulpit discoursing pleasantly, clearly and unaffectedly of the long

years of his spiritual growth and activities, it was realized that he had attained the high mark of manhood visioned by England's gifted seer, "wearing the white flower of a blameless life," and also negatived the conclusion of the Psalmist, that "if by reason of strength our years be four score, yet is their strength labor and sorrow."

**Entered Ministry at 20 Years.**

Dr. Petrie was born at Cheraw, S. C., on the 25th of February, 1840, and after graduating from the Columbia Theological Seminary he began his pastoral life on January 1, 1870. On March 5, 1878, he accepted the call to this city and during the nearly 42 years of his residence here his life has been bound up with that of his chosen flock and of the whole community. Few men have attained his eminence or achieved the amount of good and usefulness that measure his career, and none have been more loved and revered.

After the benediction, the aged though far from venerable minister, invited the gathering to participate in informal greeting and social intercourse and he was made the object of an appreciative and heart-felt congratulation that was beautiful to see.

Light refreshments were served by the ladies of the congregation and the balance of the evening was spent in singing sacred songs, social intercourse and felicitations on the part of a grateful and proud congregation at the auspicious event in their pastor's life and the history of the large and influential christian flock.

**Dr. Petrie's 80 Years.**

Dr. Petrie's address is given herewith in full, as a most valuable and inspiring contribution to religious literature and the varied history of the community he has served so long, so faithfully, and so well:

[Editorial in Charlottesville Daily Progress.]

# ADDRESS

Several epochs of my life find their reference time at this season of the year. They are grouped about a common date. This gives me the opportunity to say something that might not be regarded as suitable at other times. No time in the past so opportune. None in the future likely to occur. These are the topics I desire to speak about.

**1. Eighty Years of Life.**

I wish to tell you what it is to be old, for your faces are all turned in that direction. How it feels to be an octogenarian. What visions and reflections there are along the way, and what hopes brighten the paths yet to be trodden.

There are two classic descriptions of old age. One is by the Preacher, supposed to be Solomon, in the 12th Chapter of Ecclesiastes. It is a wonderfully ingenious picture the artist has made there. But it is an old age of infirmities. It may represent many, but it does not appeal to me. The only thing in the picture to which my soul responds is the text of the Preacher's little sermon: the first verse of the chapter. That is forever true, and forever oppor-

tune. The text is beautiful. The homily an ingenious piece of sermonic architecture. The other picture of old age is by the foremost of the pagans, the most modern of the ancient thinkers: Cicero, whose eloquence of speech is equaled by this delightful artistic touch. I refer to his exquisite essay on Old Age. It is perhaps because he was not old that he was inspired to portray only the charms of age. His essay appeals to me, for it has to do mainly with the pleasures of those higher decades which mark the domain of age.

I am really glad to be old. I find superior pleasure in these greater heights to which life's ladder leads. I should rather be old than to die young. Would not you? I should rather be still struggling than to have fallen by the way. But what I wish chiefly to say is that there are compensations for all that old age deprives us of. Yet "compensations" does not seem exactly the word to me. What are life's losses by old age compared with life's gains?

Ambition is modified: not removed. The soul is dead that is not stirred by ambition; ambition still to be, to do, to serve, to find. But it is delivered from all its anxieties,

its disturbances, and rivalries. Running a race, but not to outrun others, but to reach the goal and help others to reach the goal. To rise to the greatest height, all the while helping others to reach it too. At the top to rest in sweet communion of success. Not to get the best place, but to make the place we are at the best it can be made, and welcome others to it.

Then there are perplexities which greatly disturb till we have lived long enough to learn that they yield to a brave heart and to patient waiting, and that there is no need to be afraid. The darkest night has its limit in the golden light of another day. After the severest storm the sun will pour his light through the cloud rift to the music of the rolling thunders as they pass away. All along these decades at every halting place on the stones that mark the way is written for the christian, Romans 8:28. Don't forget it. The hardest lesson for life to learn, a lesson, if learned, is learned in age: Do not worry. This is life's rare jewel worn in greater age.

It is in the ninth decade one is most apt to gather up all experiences and sift them and store away what after all is really worth while. Of

all the things worth while, of all the treasures that enrich and abide, the incomparable blessing is the Grace of God. If I had withheld my faith till now, I would not know how to go about becoming a christian now with the little remnant of a life all of whose golden years had been devoted to self and sin.

It is a most delightful experience to be eighty years of age. There is a freshening of the atmosphere that intimates the nearing of a more salubrious clime. It is the sunny side of life—the age ideal. I wish for you that you may reach it, and enjoy its charms.

**II. Sixty Years of Preaching.**

My first sermon was preached in February, 1860, when I was 20 years of age. So I have been preaching 60 years. It is a long time to do one thing. Then a student in Columbia Theological Seminary, my first sermon was to me a memorable occasion. The preparation, the delivery, the reflection—how intense!

My call to the ministry was not like Paul's, an overwhelming call at the outset: Woe is me if I preach not. I desired to preach. I said in my heart—if God will allow me and lead me and qualify me, and not forsake me, I will preach. I will go

along, and watch for signs that indicate His will. So I did. I felt that as a christian I belonged to God. I must serve Him in some way. The only thing is to find what way will please Him most. He led me till now I have the firmest conviction that I would not, could not turn away from this high calling. From the first and all through my ministry I have felt that preaching was my first duty. The pulpit was the place for supreme consecration and unwavering devotion and untiring toil.

It is a wonderful privilege to be the bearer of Glad Tidings—for 60 years to tell the joyful tidings of salvation. Nothing else! Think of it! The reflex of it is something to be supremely grateful for. For how can one be forever telling good news to others and not live in the light and cheer of it himself? There is nothing comparable to this in all the varied toils that command the energies of men. To my dying day I shall thank God that He led me into the ministry, and after death—Well, I shall thank Him still.

I have preached about 5,000 sermons. I have selected texts, or rather texts have selected me, from every book in the great Bible. Now as I turn the leaves of the Book

these many verses seem to greet me as fellow laborers in the pleasing service of the Gospel message. With a golden light they shine on the page, and I think I hear them say or sing: Don't you remember me? My heart answers: Yes: I do. When I knew not what more to say, you told me, and I merely passed your message on.

### III. Fifty Years Pastor.

The first ten years of my preaching I spent in the Seminary, in the Army Service, and in teaching. I preached as I had opportunity. At the conclusion of the Confederate war, I had no church, and did not wait for one, but opened a classical school in Montgomery, Ala., where and at Oakland College, Miss., I taught four years. I was at Oakland College Professor and chaplain. My pastoral life began January 1, 1870, so I have been a pastor fifty years. The pastoral life is unlike anything else in the world. The family physician's relation is more like it than anything else. But that resemblance has strict limitations. The pastor in a sense is a member of every family of his pastoral charge. He is counselor in all spiritual things, in all the higher reaches after the better things of life, in all that constitutes

the noblest ideals. His touch is individual, personal. He must keep himself keyed up to intense spiritual life, for he must lift others. How can he help others, till he be himself helped in those same things? Who is sufficient for these things? Our sufficiency is of God. But for that every pastorate would be vacant tomorrow morning.

The pulpit and the pastorate are rivals for the minister's supreme love. Their attractions are very different but very charming. If either gets closer to the heart, it is perhaps the pastorate. Both have beauties, but their beauties are diverse.

Some ministers are made for the pastorate, some for the pulpit. Some are at their best in the christian home, some in God's house. They are not antagonistic, nor exclusive. In both the man of God should strive to serve, and achieve the utmost in his power. In the cultivation of each he will find his love for both will grow.

**IV. Forty-Two Years Pastorate Here**

That is a long time to do a work in one place. This pastorate in the Senior Pastorate in the Synod of Virginia. How little we knew what March 5, 1878, was heralding for us! It is well we did not know. For we

did not know each other then. What changes these years have wrought.

Charlottesville had then a population of 2,700. Now about 13,000. There is not an elder or deacon in this Church who greeted me as such when I came. It has been my privilege to induct all our present officers into office. Of 170 members that welcomed me here 21 only are still on our roll, 19 now resident here. There are but six men conducting business here today, who were conducting business here when I came. Only one member of the Charlottesville Bar today was a member of it when I came. There is no physician in Charlottesville now who was practicing when I came. There are only three residences on Park Street where the same families live who lived there 42 years ago. There are only two on High Street. A similar remark may be made of every other street in Charlottesville. There is not a church building standing that stood here on my coming, except the colored people's churches, Delevan and Mt. Zion. There is not a Professor at the University who was a Professor there when I came. There are three who were connected with the University at that time who are still here,—one of these a Professor who

has retired from active connection with the University, one who was subsequently promoted to full professorship, and who has recently retired from active service, as Professor: the other subsequently promoted to full professorship and who stills holds that position.

Our public school system in which our city takes great pride, where all our children gather every day, is an entirely new development within these years. There are many things in our city now matters of daily convenience and regarded as necessities of life that were unknown to us 42 years ago. They are such as the Y. M. C. A., electric telephones, electric lights, automobiles, city parks, hospitals, and other ingenious devices for business and pleasure.

Perhaps I might extend these reminiscences further. But this is enough to indicate the work of time in the changes which are ever taking place, and which remind us that we are not here forever. Life is a golden opportunity to be eagerly seized and carefully used.

I have had opportunities to leave you during these years. Some you were aware of—some there was no occasion for you to know. One call was very attractive—I considered it

well and long. It was a call to leave the pastorate for another kind of ministerial work. Judge Watson and Col. Duke, venerable, loved and honored men, called on me. Highly honored I felt myself to be that they should call and on the mission which brought them. They urged me to stay, and told me how many they represented. Their request had great power with me. Pastorial ties were then also pulling at my heart. My soul was stirred with tenderest emotions. I remained with you as you know. I have ever thanked God for His guidance in this decision. This church is my family. I should think as strangely of myself to leave you, apart from the fact that no others would wish me now, as I should think of any man who would leave his loved family and go out into the world to find a better home. I do not want a better home. There is no better home. This is my palace. I love it well.

I now have the best place in the world and do not expect to leave it till I am called to a still better place—not in this world—but in heaven: to which I shall go through a Gate of Pearl.

Let me account some of the blessings of the preacher-pastor life: so

much is said about its trials. He has the best Companion in the Universe: God. Others have Him too. Somehow the preacher seems to need God most: I will be with thee—So to Moses and so to Joshua, and so to all who follow them.

He has the Friend, above all other friends.

He has the Comforter—to fortify his citadel against all hostile powers.

He has the 91st. Psalm, an invulnerable shield.

He is the student of the best book in the world. Books impart themselves to the student. What a privilege every day to hold communion with the Book of Books.

He has given his years to the noblest work of all.

In life's review there is nothing finer than the thought of life long endeavor to help others to the best and most enriching blessings.

He is called to associate daily with the best people in the world. There are good people out of the church, and there are mean people in the church. But it is indisputable that church people are the best people in the world. We are ready to defend that statement at any time. I wish that the good people who are out of the church would come in and be

with us, and that the mean people in the church would stay in and become good. But take the church as it is, it holds the choicest people on this earth. It is an exalted privilege to be companion to such people—for we are made by the company we keep.

He is a man—Yes, being a preacher-pastor he does not cease to be a man. There is every reason why he should glory in his manhood. For it is a man's work he agrees to undertake and do. I like that about you. You have respected and regarded my manhood. I stand where you stand. As I regard you, so you regard me. Whenever a shadow has fallen on me, you have turned the light of your own sweet life on my darkness and helped to make it light. So I would always seek to help you, according to your need, with what I am and have.

### V. The Years To Come—Few or Many, Who Can Tell?

With all these abundant resources I have felt it would be a sin for me to be otherwise than happy, contented and confident. So I am perfectly contented, amid all the abundance of divine blessings, am eager to serve according to my

strength and opportunity, and am looking forth, peering into the unrevealed, endeavoring to discern the signs of the Divine Will, and watching for the opening of the gate, through which to pass in and on to higher things.

Meanwhile is not there something I can do for you? For I do not live in the clouds, and I do not rest on visions.

This is a church conspicious amongst many. Marked by many gifts and graces. Your praises have gone out through all the churches. You are known for your christian virtues. Much is expected of you by reason of the record you have already made. Let us seek to achieve yet more. Let us brace ourselves for great endeavors: a united force to attempt great things for God and for our fellow men.

There are great problems confronting the church today—too great to be compassed by our thought tonight. But let us hold ourselves in readiness to consider and, if possible, to solve these problems. We are His for service.

My greatest desire is the welfare of the church. Whatever will serve its interest best is ever my choice.

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Pray for divine guidance. Then when God indicates, let it be done, and let us be thankful for His guidance and His grace.

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